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AMERICA'S DUTY IN RELATION TO THE EUROPEAN WAR

ADDRESS BY
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BEFORE THE
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AMERICA'S DUTY IN REGARD TO THE EUROPEAN WAR

Duties often grow out of sentiments and beliefs, and in this instance they clearly do; so that I propose in the first place to speak of the great disappointments which this War and the second War in the Balkans have brought to thoughtful Americans and to all persons, indeed, who hoped that the human race was making some progress towards humane, just, and merciful conditions of life.

We have been startled by the outbreak, the apparently sudden outbreak, of the worst fighting that the world has ever seen in regard to destruction of life and property, and of precious treasures of letters and art. That is the literal fact. No war of former times has been so destructive of things that we imagined the human race in its civilized parts held to be precious and inviolable.

Then, most Americans believed that one of the chief methods of progress in civilization was expressed in the phrase, "the sanctity of contracts." You are all business women. You have known that modern business absolutely depends on the sanctity of contracts. It depends also upon the faith of man in man. All the commercial and financial agencies of the modern world are built on credit; and what is credit but the faith of man in man that all will observe the sanctity of a contract or agreement?

Lately, we saw in the Balkans that a bond of union under which a considerable war had been fought against an alien ruler suddenly broke to pieces; and on the rupture came one of the most ferocious wars that the world has ever seen, a war as savage as that of the Greek revolution of 1822, which at the time was supposed to be characterized by unusual ferocity. And then we were brought to this sudden outburst of war-like fury in Europe; and one of the most civilized nations in Europe immediately declared by its acts—not in words, though a declaration in words was not altogether lacking—that a solemn treaty, only a few years old, was to signify for that

nation nothing whatever, absolutely nothing. The treaty of neutrality which protected Belgium was violated in the first moments of the War. These things have brought to Americans a desperate disappointment.

The whole structure of our government rests on a single contract entered into by thirteen parties, the Constitution of the United States. We are thoroughly accustomed to the principle of federation, the joining together of distinct independent states in a common union for common purposes; and we regard that union, that federation, as the very foundation of our national life. Are such contracts, such conventions, such agreements, to be regarded in Europe as of no effect, as "pieces of paper," as the German Chancellor said, to be torn up because of what he called military necessity, which only meant that a nation going to war may take the easiest, shortest, quickest way of attacking its opponent, no matter what neutral territory may stand in the way? This total disregard of the sanctity of a contract is the heaviest of our many serious disappointments within the last two months and a half.

And then we Americans had fondly hoped that the conception of chivalry was to be preserved in the modern world, that the chivalrous man was still to exist, that a chivalrous knighthood might continue to exist, that the chivalrous principle of the strong defending and protecting the weak would develop, not dwindle, in the civilized world. Americans illustrate this state of mind, this chivalrous habit, in their treatment of women and children; and they have done so for many generations. Suddenly we find a strong nation which claims the highest degree of civilization absolutely disregarding all considerations of chivalrous action towards weaker powers. The attack by Germany on Belgium was a violent attack of a sudden on an army and a nation that was indefinitely weaker than Germany,—no comparison whatever between little Belgium and great Germany in any sort of power or force; and today Belgium has been devoured, is extinct, if Europe shall permit her to be extinguished.

We had hoped that the methods of war and the ethics of war had been shown to be capable of amelioration, of improvement. Both Conferences of the Hague labored much over ameliorations of the practices in war. This present War has blown all those efforts to the winds.

Americans, as a rule, have believed that the human race was really making a slow progress towards justice between man and man, and between nation and nation, and was making a slow progress toward the development of individual liberty. We said in our Declaration of Independence that all men are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and now we see that there is not a man or woman in Europe that has any title to life, or liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. This is another heavy disappointment to the American people.

We had hoped that the world was making some progress toward the Christian ideal of mercy, gentleness, and love as the supreme motives in human conduct; and suddenly we discover that in the most advanced nation in Europe as regards science, pure and applied, there is during war no mercy, no humanity, and that hatred quickly takes the place of friendliness, and is developed with an astonishing speed and amplitude into a fierce and abiding passion.

These disappointments weigh upon us the more because we see no issue possible of the present struggle except after long months or years of desperate warfare. The prevailing German philosophy of government and of national greatness is built upon the dogma—"Might makes Right." It seems to be a new religion among the leading Prussians that force is the only basis of national greatness and of moral dignity, and valor the highest virtue, no matter in what cause valor is displayed.

You are all women. Do you believe that might makes right? Have you ever believed it? Has the history of the human race, up from savagery to what we call civilization, suggested to you that might is the real source of right, is the only foundation of just relations between man and woman? In savage life the greater strength, power, and endurance of the man gives him absolute control over the woman; and he has always exercised it. Here in this most fortunate and blessed country we have had a totally different conception of right relations between man and woman, between adults and children, between the State and its citizens. We absolutely deny that might makes right. We believe that the foundations of the family and of the State are moral, and that these moral foundations have superseded in some measure the ancient tenet that the strong have the right to dominate the weak.

You perceive that the American objection to the political philosophy of Germany at the present day, and to its militarism, is absolutely fundamental. Our objections go to the roots of the matter, and we are irreconcilable to the whole philosophy which prevails in Germany, apparently without denial or exception in any class of society. I say "apparently," because none of us feel that at present we have access to the fundamental sentiments of the mass of the German population. We have access to the expressed views of the philosophers, poets, and historians. We, of course, have access to the expressed views of their military authorities, active or retired. We have access to the archaic conceptions which the German Emperor cherishes of his function, and of the God-given powers of himself and his family. But we have not access at this moment to the underlying sentiments of the masses of the German people; and it will probably be years before we learn them. So, thinking of these things, we have to qualify our use of the word "prevail" with the word "apparently," or the phrase "so far as we can see;" and we are permitted to hope that we do not see far enough.

Such being the gulf between American sentiments and German sentiments as they appear today, and this gulf being a matter of political and religious conviction, how are our duties as a nation to be determined in the present crisis and catastrophe for mankind?

We have no difficulty in recognizing the justice, indeed the indispensable quality of the action of our government, the official action of the nation, in the present horrible conditions. We all believe that our government has been right in declaring neutrality in the actual combat for the United States. We all believe that at present we must deal equally with the combatants on the two sides—that if we sell food to one group we must also sell food to the other; that we must pay our debts, no matter to which side. So much we are doing. We are paying our debts, no matter whether the debt is due to a German, an Austrian, a Frenchman, or an Englishman. We also keep open the lines of traffic, whether those lines run into English or French ports, or into any other port of Europe not blockaded. Our surplus food is going to all the combatants at this moment; because neutral ports give access to Germany and Austria as well as to England, France, and Russia.

But this neutrality is official or legal, as it were. It must be maintained until new conditions determine new actions. But it is, of course, quite impossible for us to be neutral as regards our feelings and beliefs, our sentiments and hopes; quite impossible, because the cause in which Germany and Austria-Hungary are fighting is the cause of imperialism, of militarism, of governments by force, using against other nations the extreme of skilfully-directed, highly-trained force. We see upon the other side the two freest large nations in Europe combined with a military empire. These two freest nations—England and France—are nations to which we of this country are deeply indebted for our own safety, freedom, and faith in liberty under law. Therefore, neutrality in our hearts is quite out of the question.

But under these conditions what can we do, what can you do to help agonized Europe? You can do everything in your power, and advise all persons over whom you have influence to do everything in their power, to keep our own industries going, to maintain the business, the work, the productiveness of this country; to restore the lines of exchange suddenly ruptured after a careful building up which has taken at least three centuries; and to restore the lines of transportation for the international exchange of goods. You can do everything in your power to prevent all kinds of hoarding within our country, within our domestic circles, hoarding of money, goods, or provisions—flour, for example, and sugar—and of purchasing beyond the usual demands of the family. All these things hurt. They hurt because they tend to an unreasonable rise of prices immediately, and on the spot. Discourage all such selfish precautions.

Every man who employs other persons should now continue to employ as many as possible of the people he has been accustomed to employ. To reduce unnecessarily expenditures on the employment of labor is an unwise and unpatriotic thing at this moment.

Are there no expenditures that we may properly reduce? Certainly there are. But at this moment I think of only one class of expenditures which might well be reduced, namely, expenditures on luxuries, particularly on luxuries which are, to say the least, silly or injurious. There are a good many such luxuries in the American community on which serious savings might be made; but those are the only expenditures which it is even justifiable to reduce

at this time, unless the money to meet normal expenditures is actually lacking. No fear of future loss of income justifies retrenchment now.

I have been speaking of our own expenditures and the employment of labor in our own country; but can we not do something for other countries in similar directions? We can continue to supply to the utmost the industries of all other countries, and particularly the industries of the European countries, with the raw materials they need for their own factories. We shall be truly neutral in so doing, if the conditions permit us to supply the raw materials of their industries, or parts of them, to all the combatants. We may not be able to serve all the nations that are at war; but should do it so far as it is possible. This is one of the neutral duties.

The prospect is that the War will last until one or other of the combatants is thoroughly exhausted. One cannot conceive of Germany submitting to defeat until she has exhausted her supplies of men, money, and food. And I am sure we shall have equal difficulty in conceiving that England will stop until she is thoroughly exhausted. Fortunately, from our point of view, there is no more resolute or dogged people in the world than the English, and we remember in that connection with satisfaction that many of us are of English extraction.

As to France,—a new thrill of feeling and sentiment has gone through France. Everyone that returns from France says that the people seemed changed, externally and internally. They are sober and serious, and they go about their daily work with a grave determination to prevent by any sacrifices the extinction, or the reduction in power, of the French nation.

But what shall I say of Russia? It is the momentary, yes, the rather permanent belief in Germany, that the Russians may be justly described as barbarians, semi-civilized people, Oriental people, incapable of that high degree of organization, and that practice of individual liberty under law which characterize the promising Occidental peoples. And it is true that the Russians are an immense mass of people only lately risen from the condition of serfs, and that they are ruled by a despotic ruler who is surrounded by an autocratic group of high public officials. But we Americans have learnt in recent years a good deal about the

Russians; and we find in them some qualities which give us hope for the huge nation, which often seems slumbering or half-awake as regards both commercial and political activity. We have had a large number of Russians poured in upon us of recent years, and we have found them to be an industrious, intelligent, romantic people, capable of all the highest sentiments of human nature, and having at heart a great ambition towards liberty and an expanding and improving life. I had occasion to observe while I was President of Harvard College that there were no more intelligent students in the University than the Russians. They had the defects of peoples that have been for generations under despotic rule, and doubtless on an immense scale they still exhibit those defects.

Many Americans have made acquaintance within the last fifteen years with modern Russian literature. It is in high degree imaginative, hopeful, and pathetic, though often revolutionary in the proper sense of that word,—that is, looking to great changes in family and social life, and in the life of the government. Tolstoy represents an immense movement of the Russian mind. It was the Czar of Russia that called the first Hague Conference. The Czar instituted the Douma, which has had already an interesting and truly remarkable career, considering that none of its members had any experience of political liberty. I admit that none of these things may go very deep, except the Russian literature. That goes deep into the heart and mind of the nation. That makes a deep impression on the heart and mind of the whole civilized world.

We have further to observe that three important steps have already been taken by Russia since this War broke out, all of them of a highly progressive nature. One is the offer to the Poles to re-constitute the Kingdom of Poland; another is to give Jews full civic rights in Russia; and the third is the imperial order prohibiting the manufacture and use of the strong alcoholic spirit that the Russians have been in the habit of drinking. That last outcome of this sudden War is a very striking one. What if an immense temperance reform should date from August, 1914, all over Russia?

We must not, therefore, accept the German view that this War is really waged to resist a new irruption of the barbarians into Europe. It is more than doubtful whether the Russians are

barbarians. It is more than doubtful whether the spirit in which the Russians are now fighting be not more accordant with the American spirit than the spirit which animates the German Empire.

We must bear in mind—indeed we are not in danger of forgetting—the deep obligations which this American nation lies under to England and France. The obligations are so deep that it is quite in vain to expect us to be in our hearts neutral during the development of this fearful catastrophe. The American people is ordinarily accused of being materialistic, of seeking the dollar, and not caring much about anything else, except the luxuries or comforts that the dollar can buy. How often we have heard that of late. It is a total misconception with regard to the fundamental beliefs and practices of the American people. We are an idealistic people. When our ideals are attacked and seem to us to be in danger, there is no people in the world that more promptly throws to the winds all material interests. When our ideals are seriously attacked, we are absolutely reckless with regard to our property, national or individual, and we care for our material resources only as means of defending our moral theories and our hopes for mankind.

We must hope and pray that we shall not be drawn into this most horrible War of all time. But that escape will be due to the fact that Russia, England, and France have succeeded in defeating Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Prophecy as to issues is impossible under such conditions as those we are now witnessing; but it is not impossible to prophecy that the American people will be true to their quality, true to their history, true to their obligations to England and to France. We all know that the American ideals came from England across the Atlantic with the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans, and have since moved majestically across the continent; and we all know that that “celestial-infernal phenomenon,” as Carlyle called the French Revolution, carried all about the civilized and half-civilized world the fundamental conceptions concerning the rights of man, and the uplifting power of liberty. The French nation, after that “celestial-infernal phenomenon,” wandered in the wilderness for more than two generations; but at last they have attained to a republican form of government, which has already lasted more than forty

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years. Can we think of giving no aid to France if she come to the end of her resources? Can we think of bringing no aid to England if she be reduced to like straits? Happily we do not need to anticipate so direful an issue. But let us not confuse our minds and wills by failing to see whither the German policies lead, whither the teachings of Bismarck, Treitschke, and Bernhardi have led Germany. Let us not dream of abandoning our faith that human relations should be, nay, shall be, determined, not by arrogant force, but by considerations of justice, mercy, love, and good will.

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